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FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0384
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0801
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0838

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000080

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/29/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: BASRA OPERATIONS COMMANDER ACKNOWLEDGES IMPROVEMENTS

REF: BASRA 000056

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Basrah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

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11. (C) SUMMARY: Basra Operations Commander, Major General Mohammed Jawad Huwaidi, acknowledged improvements in the Iraqi police (IP). He was not concerned about the reemergence of Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) as a credible force, but rather the emergence of criminal gangs of former JAM members. He expressed the need for another brigade of troops to patrol areas close to the Iranian border and was not enthusiastic about incorporating militias, such as the Sons of Iraq, into the military. Relations between Mohammed and Basra Governor remain tense. Nevertheless, the general intends to further the Iraqi Army's (IA) already-good reputation among Basrawis by establishing good civil-military relations. End Summary.

Security Continues to Improve

12. (C) On September 16, REO met with Basra Operations Commander, Major General Mohammed Jawad Huwaidi. Mohammed assessed that security improvements are continuing. He pointed out that the IP are becoming increasingly reliable and are contributing significantly to operations by Iraqi security forces (ISF). He commented that many of the nefarious elements, which once plagued the police force, have been weeded out. Mohammed credited the IP with curtailing oil smuggling through the Shatt Al-Arab and drug smuggling across the Iranian border.

JAM Returns

13. (C) Mohammed expressed concern over the return of JAM members to the area. He speculated that their exodus from Iran was the result of broken promises of support from the Iranian government. According to Mohammed, the "era of militias in control of Basra is over." He stressed that his immediate security concern was not the reemergence of JAM as a credible force to be reckoned with, but rather the emergence of criminal gangs of former JAM members. He predicted an increase in crime and assassinations as a result. [Note: In a June meeting, Mohammed predicted a "period of assassinations" prior to local elections in the fall. Reftel]

14. (C) Mohammed described his efforts to head-off potential militia and criminal operations in the province. Using National Intelligence Agency (NIA) reports, he is able to deploy troops to counter potentially hostile operations. One example he cited was the deployment of an Iraqi army (IA) unit from north Basra

to Abu Khaseeb, south of the city, based on an NIA report that JAM was returning to that area. On another occasion, Mohammed moved an army unit to the border town of Safwan because of reported criminal activity. Mohammed hopes that ISF actions will send a signal to gangs.

More Troops Needed

15. (C) Mohammed expressed a need for another brigade to patrol the border area and lamented the absence of a brigade from the 14th Division IA, which had been assigned to Baghdad. Commenting on the difficulties of subduing Iranian-backed insurgents, he noted that Iran prefers to fight in Iraq. He identified three general goals for the use of his troops: a) To stop the flow of aid and weapons from Iran; b) To stop illicit traffic along the Shatt Al-Arab; c) To have enough troops for an effective reserve force. Mohammed was adamant that additional forces were needed to maintain the gains made after Charge-of-Knights.

Sons of Iraq and Sadrists Amnesty

16. (C) Mohammed was unenthusiastic about incorporating the Sons of Iraq into the military. While admitting there were some good reasons to do so, he believed that incorporating militias into the IA was ultimately too risky. He said militias always have their own agendas, are not all loyal, and lack professionalism. Mohammad was very negative about proposals to grant amnesty to Sadrists detainees and members in exile. "As long as Iran is supporting and training them, there will be trouble." He added that, "the ones in jail should stay in jail."

Relations With Basra Governor

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17. (C) Mohammed indicated that his relations with Basra Governor Mohammed Wa'ili remained strained. He contemptuously remarked that the Governor believed he was "in charge of everything." Stressing that the Governor was not in charge of the Security Forces, he resented recent allegations from the Governor that he had been accepting money from Coalition Forces for directing his troops to assist in development projects.

18. (C) Despite cold relations with the Governor, Mohammed was able to call together influential Basrawis for a meeting with himself and the Coalition leadership on September 22 at Basra International Airport's VIP reception room. Iraqi attendees included Director Generals for ports, electricity, water; high-level officials from South Oil Company (oil and gas); and factory managers for steel, fertilizer, and petrochemical plants. Coalition leadership participants included Commander of MND-SE Major General Andy Salmon, UK Consul General Nigel Haywood, and REO Director.

19. (C) Comment: While General Mohammed's security assessment is generally optimistic, it is tempered by elements of realism and thus does not come across as self-serving. The contrast between his negative appraisal of the IP in a previous meeting (reftel) and his more optimistic current evaluation suggests real improvement by the IP. Clearly influenced by the collective advice from the Coalition leadership in Basra, Mohammed's initiative to bring together Basrawi stakeholders was intended to further the IA's good reputation among Basrawis by establishing good civil-military relations and to genuinely offer the IA's support in the reconstruction of Basra.

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